CHAPTER 6

André, Theatricality, and the Time of Revolution

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Aspects of Revolution

In her excellent study *Anglophilia*, Elisa Tamarkin reveals a widespread fascination in antebellum America with being "lost in the indeterminate worlds of colonial loyalties."[1] She describes the "uneven temporality of national experience," in which "American independence simply feels like the vertiginous capacity to be both nationalistic and nostalgic for our antenational relations" (148). In these reveries, the colonial past is not repudiated or sloughed off, but rather virtualized as an imaginative keepsake. Instead of a definitive new order, from which there is no turning back, the revolution installs an "uneven temporality." Independence without revolution: history is what doesn't hurt.

In Tamarkin's instructive account, antebellum Anglophilia above all embraces artifice, theatricality, "good form" (133). This investment in forms of play is nowhere more evident than in the intensity of interest in Major John André. André was the British liaison to the traitorous Benedict Arnold. Caught by the Americans in civilian disguise and with intel in his boot, he was hanged by Washington's order, an event that sent shockwaves of feeling through the colonies and in England, many seeing the decision to hang André rather than afford him the gentleman's dignity of a firing squad as a needlessly inflexible judgment. The embrace of André is one of the great enigmas of early national America: "Perhaps no person in the like circumstances was ever more lamented by those whose prime interests he had attempted to destroy."[2] The story of André, his capture and execution, is gone over again and again in the decades following the revolution, but Tamarkin's sources seem just as interested in André as a type of the warrior-aesthete at play. Before the unfortunate spying business, there were all "the poems he wrote for *Rivington's Gazette*, his passionate love of society, his good ear and eye for writing songs and taking sketches throughout the American campaign"; and above all there was "the exciting and charming

role André played in the Mischianza" (143). This elaborate entertainment took place in occupied Philadelphia in 1778, and its "ludic legend" (129) continued to engage Americans well into the nineteenth century. (Perhaps the best-known treatment is Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Howe's Masquerade.") Antebellum investment in André and his creations implies a kind of historical formalism in which, as Tamarkin writes, "the contest is not meant to be won or lost but rightly performed"(132). The Mischianza promoted a vision of war that sidelined its consequences, as if war "might be celebrated not for its victories but for its own sake" (132). In the Mischianza, evidently, antebellum Americans found a model of a military contest as *performance* that nourished their own understanding of the revolution as something that had happened in *theatrical time*, a time not of rupture and a radical new order, but one porous to the temporal boundaries that lie both before and after the performance itself.

Tamarkin's study helps make sense of what might otherwise seem peculiar, namely, that when James Fenimore Cooper sets out to write about the revolution in what is often called the "first historical novel" in the United States, he chooses espionage as his theme, and saturates his text in the terms of disguise and theater. Like his contemporaries, though perhaps with greater directness, Cooper questions the fact of revolution *per se*. "Americans had no revolution, strictly speaking," he asserts in *Notions of the Americans*; "they have only preceded the rest of Christendom in their reforms, because circumstances permitted it."[3] He refines this idea elsewhere: "We have ever been reformers rather than revolutionists. Our own struggle for independence was not in its aspect a revolution" (I, 269). It's a strange phrase: "in its aspect." The revolution did not *present* itself as a revolution, it seems to say, it could not be *taken* as one, given the aspect it showed the world. Even if it *were* a revolution, we could not see it as such. There is a nearly Wittgensteinian subtlety in this phrasing that acknowledges that the world is not transparent, that you must do the best you can with the masks and aspects it presents. The face of the revolution, the aspect it presents the world, disturbs its temporality, smudging its legibility as a punctual event.

The idea that the American War of Independence was not really a "revolution" is not, in fact, either rare or new. It's the conceit underlying Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," after all – two different Georges, same sign. Already in the early 1960s, according to Hannah Arendt, the view that "no revolution has ever taken place in America" had "become rather common among modern historians."[4] This is largely because we have long seen revolution through the lens of the *French* Revolution, a "disaster,"

according to Arendt, that nonetheless "made world history" (56). She means this last phrase quite literally: it was Hegel, and after him Marx, who first discerned in the clash of forces unleashed in France an image of "world history" as a dialectic that in its fury and consequence was as much a matter of "necessity" as any natural force: "Whenever in our own century revolutions appeared on the scene of politics, they were seen in images drawn from the course of the French Revolution, comprehended in concepts coined by spectators, and understood in terms of historical necessity" (56).

Nothing seems terribly "necessary" in the American Revolution, by contrast. And while she disagrees with those who see no revolution at all in the War of Independence, Arendt concedes that much remains unintelligible: "The outcome of the American Revolution, as distinct from the purposes which started it, has always been ambiguous" (136), and its origin also lacks the drama of the French "Year One": "The American Revolution succeeded, and still did not usher in a *novus ordo saeclorum*" (68). In Arendt's treatment, the American Revolution is a successful and momentous event in history that seems somehow impossible to appreciate as such: rather than ushering in an understanding of historical necessity, the American Revolution occupies an ambiguous dimension athwart the flow of time, of uncertain origin and end.

As for Cooper and his contemporaries, this "uneven temporality" (Tamarkin) in Arendt is tangled up with forms of theatricality. Arendt suggests that there is an ancient and still potent link between theater and the world of politics: *persona* in Latin is first a word for an actor's mask through which the voice can be projected, and later becomes the term for a legal personality, where it names the distinction between a private individual – a natural man or *homo* – and a citizen, someone with a political existence: "It was as though the law had affixed to him the part he was to play on the public scene, with the provision, however, that his own voice would be able to sound through" (107). This "public scene," she argues, is one in which what matters is not who you are, but how you appear. That there is a private person behind any political *persona* is accepted as fact but is not problematic in and of itself.

And here we must introduce a subtle spatial problematic, to supplement our focus on the disturbances in temporal sequencing tied to theatricality. Arendt can only conceive of this legal and political space as *set apart* from natural existence, as the measure of a distance, whether it separates the home from the public sphere or the creaturely face from the political *persona* it bears. Because there is the necessary doubleness in play, because

politics is irreducibly theatrical, it requires careful spatial stabilization: *here*, in this space, one is allowed to see both actor and role in delicate balance; over *there*, by contrast, no such doubled vision is expected or allowed. For all their emphasis on spectacle and extravagance of gesture, the French revolutionaries were at war with this idea of a stable link between politics and theatricality: "By the unending hunt for hypocrites" – *hypokrites* is Greek for actor – "and through the passion for unmasking society, they had, albeit unknowingly, torn away the mask of the *persona* as well" (108). They had destroyed the set-aside world of politics, in which "true equality" can be attained, and enforced a merely "natural" equality that "left all inhabitants equally without the protecting mask of a legal personality" (108). It was as if they burned down the theater in which they were imprisoned.

In *On Revolution*, Arendt quotes a letter of John Adams: "The poor man's conscience is clear; yet he is ashamed . . . He feels himself out of the sight of others, groping in the dark. Mankind takes no notice of him. He rambles and wanders unheeded . . . . He is not disapproved, censured, or reproached; *he is only not seen*" (69). Having a political existence is a matter of being *seen*, of being *seeable*.[5] An ancient logic of emulation is at work in the political sphere: Arendt quotes approvingly Adams's dictum, "*spectemur agendo* – 'let us be seen in action'" (136). But Adams – always looking behind him, even to the ancients, one reason Arendt likes him so much – is whistling in the dark. The spatial stability of appearance, the reliable play of shadow and spotlight Adams invokes in his ruminations on the "poor man," is in rapid dissolution during his lifetime. Political theater in, and after, the Revolution was neither compartmentalized into a brightly lit arena in which elites were "seen in action" while the rest toiled in the obscurity of nonpolitical insignificance, nor was it the (theatrical) destruction of the theater itself, a conflagration so total it required starting over at "Year One." The fixities of all manner of anciens régimes had been giving way for some time before these conflicts, and theatricality – the name for an unstable but ineliminable linkage of individual and persona, of private and political existence – was an index of this newly mobile world. It is as if theatricality overflows the stabilizations of the theater itself: the theater becomes less a rooted and walled space in which complex modes of belonging and empowerment can be negotiated because they are contained therein, than an emblem of uprooting itself: a de-territorialized theater, if we can imagine such a thing. It is no accident that those who have taught us most about the flux and flow of the modern spatial order, of the "Black Atlantic" (Gilroy) or the "Circum-Atlantic" (Roach) or the "performative

commons in the Atlantic world" (Dillon) have adopted the analysis of performance and theater as their necessary lens.[6] The forces of deterritorialization unleashed by the modern Atlantic system, forces that find expression in the revolutions of the era, show early, and burn intensely, in the modes of theatricalization and performance scattered across the Atlantic world. Dillon speaks of a paradoxically "intimate distance" that defines theatrical experience in the new world, a scrambling of spatial coordinates. In what follows, and using André as a red thread, I will look at how the problem of theatricality plays across the revolution and its aftermath in the United States, implicating ideas of space and the time of revolution itself.

André and the Mischianza

In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga tells us that it was in working on his earlier study, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1919), as he was "trying to describe the purpose of all this" – all this being "tournaments and joustings, the orders, the vows," the "sumptuous apparatus" of late-chivalric culture – that "the intimate connection between culture and play first dawned" on him.[7] The waging of war does have deep ties to theater and display: "tournaments and joustings" expose this link, modeling warfare as theatrical contest. But insofar as the warrior is animated by the distinction between his individual life and his martial role and duty, something very similar to the Arendtian distinction between person and *persona* is in play. With this important difference: whereas the theatricality of politics strives for some spatial stability, warriors are necessarily on the go. We speak of "theaters of war" in which the warrior's honor can display itself, but such theaters of war are themselves objects of contest. Theater, in war, is not so much *in* a place, as it *commands* space.

In May 1778, in occupied Philadelphia, there was another tournament, this one forming the centerpiece of the extravagant entertainment devised by André that he dubbed the "Mischianza." A "square lawn of 150 yards on each side, lined with troops," framed a contest between the Knights of the Burning Mountain and the Knights of the Blended Rose. The ladies for whom the Knights ostensibly fought were daughters of Loyalist families in Philadelphia, and they were extravagantly costumed, according to André's specifications, in "Turkish habits" and feathered turbans.[8] The tournament, significantly, was called a draw.

Designed as a send-off to General Howe, who had been recalled to London for his failure to prosecute the war with vigor, the Mischianza was

in one sense the culmination of this dubious campaign. Since January "Howe's Strolling Players" had been mounting stage productions for their own amusement in occupied Philadelphia – fourteen in all, including *Henry IV, Part I*, John Home's *Douglas*, and Susannah Centlivre's *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret*. Such military theatricals were not uncommon in the era, especially among the British; but even Washington's troops staged at Valley Forge a performance of the great warhorse of republican virtue, Addison's *Cato*.[9] All this despite the Continental Congress's ban on theatrical productions, an official position that made the thespian adventures of "Howe's Strolling Players" a special affront. These months from January through May 1778 were a dark period for the Continental Army, with some 2,500 of Washington's troops dying at the camp at Valley Forge, but rather than finishing them off, Howe's Army was wintering and socializing. Rather than fighting, they were playing. Kenneth Silverman provocatively calls the Mischianza the "climax to the fun" of Howe's stay in America.[10]

André placed special emphasis on the tournament, but it is the elaborate choreography that most interests me. André appears as part event planner and part logistics office. A "grand regatta" (353) brought the revelers upriver on "gallies," accompanied by flat boats with musicians; naval vessels lay at anchor "magnificently decorated" (353). Seventeen-gun salutes signaled the beginning of a procession through two separate triumphal arches, the passage between the two being specified as "300 feet long and 34 broad" (355). The revelers then ascended a set of steps into a "spacious hall" for "lemonade, and other cooling liquors" (356); the walls were hung with "85 mirrours, decked with rose-pink ribbands" (356). At ten o'clock, the windows were thrown open to provide a view of an elaborate display of fireworks. Then: "At twelve supper was announced, and large folding doors, hitherto artfully concealed, being suddenly thrown open, discovered a magnificent saloon of 210 feet by 40, and 22 in height" (356). André's description ends in an ecstasy of enumeration:

> Fifty-six large pier-glasses, ornamented with green silk artificial flowers and ribbands; 100 branches with three lights in each, trimmed in the same manner as the mirrours; 18 lustres each, with 24 lights, suspended from the cieling [*sic*], and ornamented as the branches; 300 wax-tapers, disposed along the supper-tables; 430 covers, 1200 dishes; 24 black slaves, in oriental dresses, with silver collars and bracelets, ranged in two lines, and bending to the ground as the General and the Admiral approached the saloon. (356)

I have excerpted from André's letter to emphasize the armature of the event, its insistent attention to squares, lines, staging areas, and thresholds generally, whether from water to land, from tournament ground to hall, from inside to outside, or from hall to (hidden) saloon. Daniel O'Quinn has made a strong case that André's choreography of the Mischianza is in intimate dialogue with two other similar "diversionary extratheatrical performances" – the "Fête Champêtre" organized by John Burgoyne in June 1774 and the Thames Regatta one year later.[11] All three events are marked both by "intense topicality" and by "formal variousness" (45). The building erected for the Mischianza, for example, is modeled on Robert Adam's construction for Burgoyne's "Fête," right down to the hidden doors ready to be thrown open in the climactic revelation of the dining area. Like the Fête Champêtre and the Thames Regatta, the Mischianza uses both allegorical messaging and abstract itineraries – from water to land, from public green space to private built space, for example – to fold in, as it were, the socio-symbolic topography of the world being presented. The manipulation of the thresholds for this latter mode of expression seems especially energetic in the Mischianza: as André's revelers step off their gallies, step into their lines of procession, gather around the tournament display ground, march through their triumphal arches, enter their hall, gaze out their windows at the fireworks, and finally discover with delight a heretofore hidden passage still to be traversed when the doors to the saloon are thrown wide, they are negotiating thresholds as a mode of entertainment.

We see here how military theater does not so much occupy a place as attempt to *create* and *command* space. I say "attempt to" both because André's place-making frenzy seems to signal compensatory energies and because the relation between theatrical and military space had become quite complex, even volatile, at just this moment. By the time Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Camp* (1778) was staged at Drury Lane, for example, the military camp at Coxheath had already become a live-action drama in which the elite played at crossing the line between observation of military life and participation in it. "In representing Coxheath," writes Gillian Russell in her excellent *The Theatres of War*, "playwrights and actors were not so much theatricalizing the camps as mediating events that already constituted theatre."[12] On the one hand, the British military class endorsed a tight linkage between the playhouse and the battlefield; on the other hand, this linkage could no longer be controlled, so pervasive was the role of "media" mentioned by Russell. And nowhere was this mismatch more exposed than in the colonies during the

War of Independence: "There were no more energetic exponents of the idea of war as a gentleman's game," writes Russell, "than the officers who were sent to quell the rebellious colonists of America" (27). The British officer class, "by persisting in gentlemanly behavior – gaming, amateur theatricals, fine dress, the club, politics – ensured that the army did not become detached from the class whose interests it was defending. The link between the theatre of the battlefield and that of the club or drawing-room was one of the most significant expressions of the ideology of a war of élites at this period" (19). But this ideology of a "war of élites" was precisely what was under enormous pressure in the revolutionary developments in North America and later in France. And the warrior elites knew it, or at least André did: the willful embrace of archaism – medieval tournaments, etc. – acknowledges this revolutionary temporality by lodging an extravagant protest against it.

This play with liminality – as O'Quinn's detailed contextual analyses make clear – is temporal as well as spatial. These paratheatrical events are responses to a closely monitored and rapidly fluctuating political, social, and military scene: they exist in a tight feedback loop with their own uptake by the press. "Intensely topical," the events allegorize in their choreographic forms the flux of a history-in-becoming.[13] O'Quinn argues, for example, that André's scripting for the Mischianza amounts to a sophisticated commentary on the messages of the previous events: "The Mischianza satirizes both events and, in so doing, opens up a middle way for the performance of martial masculinity that navigates between the Scylla of petticoat government associated with the organizers of the regatta and the Charybdis of misplaced bellicosity that Howe associated with Burgoyne" (156).

In O'Quinn's treatment, the Mischianza is fundamentally directed overseas: an "event staged to be written about" (154), the Mischianza is a knowing and ironic entrant in the list of performances through which the ruling imperial elites mirrored themselves at a moment of considerable doubt and uncertainty. The Mischianza charts a middle course: despite its extravagance and the fanfare of thresholds being crossed, the event is a kind of argument for moderation, for delay, for keeping doors open. Howe's posture toward the war was basically not to push things so far that a breach became irreparable; it's a posture that tries to keep always in view an outside to the conflict, a peace to be restored between antagonists who are also understood to be brothers. Pointing out that the tournament was the central innovation of the Mischianza, what André *added* to the Fête Champêtre and the Thames Regatta, O'Quinn suggests that its

significance lies ultimately in its very inconsequence. "The conflict [between the mock knights] itself is no more resolved than the American war was at this time. The 'conflict' is called off in the ladies' name before any decisive conclusion" (151). Ultimately, the Mischianza, and the tournament at its heart, are exercises in "attenuation, rather than closure" (151). Much of the "precarious balance" on display in André's choreography is dedicated to this message that nothing has yet been decided, that no matter how many thresholds have been crossed, there are others that have not yet been (some of them hidden from view, such as that to the dining saloon).

The Mischianza, then, tells stories about both space and time. Its theatricality aims to put space in motion and time on hold. It is about "attenuation," as O'Quinn says; it dawdles. Play and games (like the tournament) have a distinctive temporality. *Nach dem Spiel ist vor dem Spiel*, the great German football coach Sepp Herberger said: after the game is before the game. There is always another performance, another contest. The Mischianza prevaricates about the war, keeping royalists and colonists implicitly, at least, in a space of the "rules of war" as equal antagonists: this is one of the narcissistic pleasures afforded to Americans by André's theatricality. But play space – as much as political space – must be set off against an outside to enable this meeting of equals. And it was just this set-aside, this separation of elites and commoners, players and nonplayers, that was being destroyed by the revolution. Hence André's emphasis on a dramaturgy of the control of space, as though the theater could be erected before our very eyes, and in ever-changing milieus, as though the theater could be everywhere in principle and nowhere in particular. If it is that, it is not in André's or anyone's power to manage.

André and *The Spy*

We have been tracking various problems of "theatricality" and how they disturb both temporal and spatial fixities. We have seen how Cooper calls into question the event of the revolution in an early articulation of a position that becomes something of a historiographical received idea by the time Arendt takes up the indeterminacy of the revolution 140 years later. We have then looked at André's choreography of the Mischianza as exemplary of the extreme pressures placed on the military concepts of theater, whether those are taken as battlefield or playhouse. Cooper's treatment of these themes in *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821) offers another turn of the screw, returning both to the obscurity of the event of revolution that had to be fought once in a "neutral zone" rife

with deceit and disguise and that had to be fought a second time in Cooper's own lifetime. And as so often in Cooper, the human conflicts and contradictions displace themselves onto the land itself, a re-territorialization that renders the ideological solutions provided by Scott's historical novels constitutively out of reach. The result is a reckoning with a new and democratic order in which all appearance is subject to doubt, making time idle and space recede.

Major John André is mentioned fifteen times in Cooper's *The Spy,* and the Mischianza is mentioned not at all. But that doesn't mean Cooper was ignorant of André as author of that extravaganza. A few years after *The Spy*, in *Notions of the Americans* (1828), Cooper goes over the André affair again. Here he acknowledges the military necessity of spying in principle, while also refusing to grant André any exemption from the "common and creditable feeling of mankind" against it (I, 219). More interesting is the drama of surrogacy that plays out in the aftermath of André's capture and execution. Cooper suggests that the American posture toward André, both military and emotional, is determined by his status as a surrogate for Benedict Arnold. Washington "had reasonable hopes of capturing Arnold, in which case he intended that justice should be appeased by one victim" (I, 220). "It was once suggested to André that he might still be exchanged for Arnold. 'If Arnold could' – said Hamilton, who made the proffer. 'Stop,' returned the condemned man. 'Such a proposition can never come from *me*'"(I, 221).[14] But it is not a mere abstract equivalence at work. Cooper understands that André's "amiable" reputation is part of why his death stung so badly: André was "not only an officer of high and responsible situation, but he was one who had made himself dear by his amiable qualities" (I, 218). It was just such "amiable qualities" – on sumptuous display in the Mischianza – that fascinated Cooper's contemporaries, as Tamarkin shows. Displaying a well-nigh Freudian sensitivity to psychodynamics, Cooper suggests that a displacement of affect had converted hate into love: "A feeling of universal compassion was excited for him who had been captured, which probably received some portion of its intenseness from the general indignation against him [Arnold] who had escaped" (I, 219).

André's execution, and the playful drama of his Mischianza, are intertwined. André stands for theatricality, for performance, in both cases. His last hours, his hastily penned self-portrait, his (ungranted) request to be shot rather than hanged, his demeanor on the scaffold: all these details form part of a self-conscious performance, just as Nathan Hale's words before his execution – "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my

country" – are borrowed from Addison's *Cato* (Shafer 31). A logic of surrogacy is at work throughout.[15] Even if André's role requires him to reject one form of it – "such a proposition can never come from *me*" – it asserts itself anyway in how André is memorialized by his American enemies. *If we cannot kill our traitor in fact, we'll adopt our enemy in memory*. Although the Mischianza is not mentioned in *The Spy*, it is encrypted there. The Mischianza was staged on the estate of Loyalist Joseph Wharton. In Cooper's novel, it is another Wharton whose country estate, "The Locusts," serves as the central meeting ground for the characters, a kind of stage set, with characters entering and exiting. André was much assisted in mounting the Mischianza by Loyalist Oliver de Lancey, who in fact succeeded André as adjutant general for Sir Henry Clinton – more surrogacy – after the execution. Cooper refers to de Lancey in a footnote in *The Spy*, where he also encourages us not to confuse *that* de Lancey with "Colonel de Lancey," commander of the Loyalist-affiliated vigilantes, "The Cow-boys" (208). It was the de Lancey family into which Cooper had married and from whom tales of revolutionary-era Westchester had been told to him. A tangled web of names and affiliations leads back to André in both 1780 *and* 1778.

André was captured in September of 1780, and Cooper's story is set a mere two months later. Henry Wharton, a Loyalist captain, visits his father and sisters behind enemy lines and has donned a disguise to do so. He is discovered by the Americans, and for the rest of the novel André's fate hangs over Wharton: if Washington could hang André, will he not do the same to Wharton? And, indeed, Washington eventually approves the order of execution, even as he instructs Harvey Birch, a Westchester peddler and a spy in Washington's employ, to manage Wharton's escape. So: who is the spy in *The Spy*? There's the real spy (Birch), the unjustly accused spy (Wharton) and the recently hanged spy (André). "The spy" in the novel's title begins to seem less like a person than a category, and the novel itself less the story of a life than an analysis of a historical condition.

In this regard, Cooper is adapting Walter Scott, as everyone has observed since Cooper himself. "Scott's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types," writes Georg Lukács.[16] You start with "the spy" as a type, *then* find a character to "embody" it.[17] Lukács famously characterizes the Scott hero as "always more or less a mediocre, average English gentleman" (Lukács 33), one who – like wavering Waverly – is caught narratively and often morally between two conflicting sides. "Through the plot, at whose centre stands this hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing

social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another" (36). As the subtitle tells us, *The Spy* is precisely a "Tale of the Neutral Ground," but there is something rather more extreme at work in Westchester than in Scott's versions of this idea.[18] Birch is, first of all, no "gentleman," he is a poor peddler: in the preface, Cooper remarks that only certain classes of men are fitted to be spies, those who belong to "a condition in life which render[s] [them] the least reluctant to appear in so equivocal a character" (4). Birch is no gentleman, then, but he is also no waffler: he is a partisan. It is his structural *role* that requires him to show so "equivocal a character." Furthermore, the "neutral ground" in Cooper's novel is not merely a convenient location "upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another" (36), though it is that, too. It is a zone in which *all* characters find themselves determined not merely by the opposition of forces but also by the prevalence of disguise that makes those forces difficult to discern.

Territory signifies differently for Cooper than for Scott, and his way of operationalizing the "neutral ground" thus introduces a crucial distinction between his project and Scott's, at least as Lukács conceives the latter. *The Historical Novel*, we might remind ourselves, is the work of a brilliant critic who has internalized precisely the belief in "historical necessity" that Arendt suggests the French Revolution first made attractive (and that the American Revolution did not, and could not). Lukács does not think Scott shares his understanding of the dialectics of class struggle, needless to say; but he *does* think his novelistic innovations reveal its correctness. Scott's very "conservative philistinism" (34) allowed him to find in English history "the consolation that the most violent vicissitudes of class struggle have always finally calmed down into a glorious 'middle way'" (32). But this "middle way" eludes Cooper. He *wants* it: nothing is more characteristic of Cooper than the dogged way he pursues his cake, and the eating of it. But try as he might to project a Scott-like imperturbability, he seems always slightly agitated. H. L. Mencken characterizes Cooper's overall project as an astonishing combination of productivity and litigiousness: this "backwoods *Junker*" sustained multiple lawsuits even as he "managed to pour out novel after novel, to project vast and complicated histories . . . and to belabor his fellow Americans with pamphlets and pronunciamentoes, philippics and pasquinades."[19] With Cooper, everything seems slightly unsettled, open ended, despite the ideological hectoring. Thus it is with *The Spy*: clearly a patriotic book, with an unstained Washington and a great plebeian hero in Birch, the novel also explores conflicts of legitimacy it does not resolve. Some have called it a "subversive" book, but that

feels too strong.[20] The rift it opens in the ideological justification for the revolution does not serve critique. What Cooper installs with this novel is a kind of idling present. And as with André's exercise in "attenuation" in the Mischianza, temporal blurring implicates problems of spatial management. Joseph J. Letter has recently brought attention to this "open-ended present," seeing in it the distinctive temporal contribution of the historical novel in the United States: "To acknowledge a continuously open-ended present destabilizes the historical past, making it a site of ambivalence and a vehicle for disrupting certitude about the course the nation was following. A presentist orientation suggests that the allegorical discourse of early historical novels and tales is closer to what Homi K. Bhabha terms a 'performative' mode, as opposed to a 'pedagogical' one."[21]

Let us return, then, to the problems of performance that pervade Cooper's novel. The dramas of privilege and honor that play themselves out in the Wharton homestead are, I would argue, both central to the plot and secondary to Cooper's purpose. The problems begin with the paterfamilias, a man capable of "perfect imbecility" (259), who imagines he can be both participant and spectator: "After making a provision against future contingencies, by secretly transmitting the whole of his money to the British funds, this gentleman determined to continue in the theatre of strife, and to maintain so strict a neutrality as to ensure the safety of his large estate, whichever party succeeded"(24). But the "neutral ground" of Westchester is, as Cooper goes out of his way to demonstrate, a place where feints, disguises, unreadable intentions – all the tools of espionage – are endemic. Everyone is in on it, from George Washington to Caesar, the black servant to the Whartons, who "had established a regular system of espionage" (49). Neutrality is itself a disguise:

> a large proportion of . . . inhabitants . . . affected a neutrality they did not feel . . . Great numbers . . . wore masks, which even to this day have not been thrown aside; and many an individual has gone down to the tomb, stigmatised as a foe to the rights of his countrymen, while, in secret, he has been the useful agent of the leaders of the revolution; and, on the other hand, could the hidden repositories of divers flaming Patriots have been opened to the light of day, royal protections would have been discovered concealed under piles of British gold. (10)

For the characters in the story, as we have seen, the André affair is a fresh wound, and a potent warning. For the readers of *The Spy*, André was also fresh news. In the four years previous, a major controversy had erupted around a petition by one of André's captors for a larger pension, a petition

which provoked Benjamin Tallmadge, then representative from Connecticut but during the war Washington's chief of espionage, and the man who had guarded André in the days before his execution, to charge the captors with being "Cowboys," that is, military freebooters under the nominal control of the Loyalist and British forces. The captors – heroes of the revolution up till now – really wanted cash and clothes, Tallmadge asserted, and when André didn't have enough, they turned him in to the Americans. Then, in August 1821, just months before the publication of *The Spy* in December of that year, James Buchanan, the British consul in New York, oversaw the disinterment of André's remains and their repatriation to Westminster Abbey. Another controversy erupted as to whether André had been buried in his uniform or not. The entire sequence of events revivified André's "ambiguous role in the American Revolution," as Robert Cray writes. "Respectable society perceived André as a symbol of genteel bravery and sentimentality. Critics labeled him a spy, unworthy of special treatment, his disinterment a disgrace to the memory of his captors and George Washington."[22] In this story, the tomb is indeed opened, but does nothing to clarify André's "ambiguous role" in the American imagination. The conflict of values is taken into the very bosom of the earth, without resolution.

This "neutral ground" in which neutrality is the most popular disguise is nevertheless home to some who continue to imagine they can enact their martial theater of honor. Cooper's attitude toward the posturing of his elites is ambivalent. On the one hand, he acknowledges the pathos that comes from conflicts between duty and desire, between bearer and function. On the other hand, he knows this theater of honor in its pure form is historically superseded and more than a little ridiculous. The showiness of the British military, to take one famous example, is disdained by Cooper: "The English column, after advancing for a short distance on the level land, displayed with an accuracy that would have done them honour on a field-day in their own Hyde Park" (92). "Displaying" here is intransitive – done for its own sake, as in an exercise. Then, too, the gyrations and gesticulations of the Wharton clan become more and more absurd as the novel progresses. At times, Cooper is bored by them: "The bride and the bridegroom are immemorially privileged to be dull" (253). On the other, he cannot help entangling them in ridiculous problems of disguise and revelation. "The beauty of the sister furnished the mask to conceal the brother!" (365), he exclaims in a head-scratcher. When Dunwoodie ecstatically proclaims his commitment to duty – "'I will show the world a bridegroom,' *perhaps deceiving himself a little*, 'who is equal to arresting

the brother of his bride.'" – Frances has a deflating riposte: "'And will the world comprehend this refinement?' said Frances" (367, emphasis added).

Against this theater of honor, harder and harder to "comprehend" in its decadent ideological "refinement," Cooper poses a new and more complex dynamic of being and appearance. The theater of honor requires that spectators can see both sides of a conflict between duty and desire, can witness a struggle between who one is and what one must do. But in untethering "the spy" from any one person, in generalizing it to the level of social condition, Cooper pushes beyond this structure. The two figures that define this new dynamic are George Washington and Harvey Birch. Both appear disguised, but neither conforms to the rules of a theater of honor, in which role and person are in visible conflict. Where for Frances and Henry Wharton, and for Peyton Dunwoodie, the "Locusts" is their natural home, both Birch and Washington merely pass through; their theater is, as it were, out of doors. As the novel opens, a traveler who reveals himself as "Mr. Harper" waits out a storm at "The Locusts." As we learn, it is Washington himself, and his traveling alone under an alias indicates how pervasive the dynamics of espionage are: "Mr. Wharton had in vain endeavoured to pierce the disguise of his guest's political feelings; but while there was nothing forbidding in his countenance, there was nothing communicative; on the contrary, it was strikingly reserved" (17). Washington, as "Harper," knows that he will appear in a zone in which disguises are the norm. But he will not activate interest in any difference between appearance and reality by calling attention to the divide, by being either "forbidding" or "communicative." Instead, he is "strikingly reserved," somehow both forthright and recessed. As Washington explains to Birch later on, the requirement that he project a kind of pure publicity, an absorption into a role without remainder, means that he can never avow Birch, his instrument. Birch's dilemma is the inverse: he, too, must have a pure publicity, but his must be as someone whose interior and exterior never align. He must be taken as a spy. He is a spy (for the Americans) whose disguise is as a spy (for the British). Like Washington, he cannot access a theater of honor; he cannot play, in public, with the divisions between his inner life and his outward role.

Recall the letter of John Adams quoted by Arendt: "The poor man's conscience is clear; yet he is ashamed . . . He feels himself out of the sight of others, groping in the dark. Mankind takes no notice of him. He rambles and wanders unheeded. . . . He is not disapproved, censured, or reproached; *he is only not seen*" (69). I suggested earlier that even for Adams himself the clear line between invisibility and political agency was

a thing of the past. The newly de-territorialized theater characteristic of the "neutral zone" that Cooper explores demonstrates just how far things have changed. At first glance, we might think Adams's description could apply to Birch: his plebeian conscience is clear, and yet he feels "ashamed." Mostly, he feels a kind of rage at not being able to explain himself, especially to his fellow patriots. In this existential sense, "*he is only not seen*." But this invisibility is paradoxically public, and necessarily so. Birch's movements throughout the neutral zone are strangely inconsistent. On the one hand, he confounds everyone by his ability to move from one zone to another without detection. So uncanny are these movements that he is considered by some to be in league with the devil; and his characteristic "gliding" (286, 396) locomotion suggests that while he may be *of* this territory, he is not *on* it, not bound to it as others are: his is a "mystified body" (295). But on the other hand, because his disguise is as a spy, he *must* be seen, and must be seen in order to be "disapproved, censured, reproached." His way of being seen and unseen merge.

While he often seems as difficult to track as the wind itself, the novel's most outrageous coups de théâtre are also of Birch's devising, whether it is his escape in drag, his impersonation of a fanatic preacher, or his putting Henry Wharton in blackface. His knowledge of the land and his theatrical genius are in unstable alliance, sometimes to Birch's dismay. He has a kind of lookout at the top of the ridge overlooking the valley in which "The Locusts" is located. From there, he can observe without being seen. But when his window glints in the sun, Frances spies it: the seer is seen. This retreat is in one sense Birch's attempt to disappear into the land, to stand outside the realm of appearance and disguise that is the "neutral zone." But when Frances gets there, she discovers that it is like a costume shop for home theatricals: "Against the walls and rock were suspended, from pegs forced into the crevices, various garments, and such as were apparently fitted for all ages and conditions, and for either sex. British and American uniforms hung peaceably by the side of each other; and on the peg that supported a gown of striped calico, such as was the usual country wear, was also depending a well-powdered wig" (356). The antagonism between the British and Americans here deflates to these limp and neighborly garments, uniforms become costumes, bespeaking a theatricalization of warfare that nullifies its historical power and that *almost* – but not quite – recedes into the bosom of the territory itself.

As many have observed, Cooper finds in Harvey Birch a character type that he perfects in Natty Bumppo, a figure who conveys social truth through a basic obscurity, unreadability, or tendency to abscond and

disappear. Birch and Bumppo displace social contradictions onto the land itself. John P. McWilliams observes that "Cooper's characters, like Hardy's, are remembered against a landscape."[23] We have seen Frances fixing Birch in his mountaintop retreat. In the epilogue to *The Spy* – the chapter that overtly suggests that the revolution settled nothing, since it had to be fought again in 1812 – Cooper affords Frances's son, Wharton Dunwoodie, another such vision as he stands at Niagara Falls: "a man crossing in the very eddies of the cataract, and in a skiff no bigger than an egg-shell" (402). An absurd image, no doubt. But one that in its combination of vividness and precariousness is true to Cooper's representational dilemma. If the "neutral ground" tells us anything about the revolution, it is that the struggle, in de-territorializing theatricality, made marking beginnings and endings well-nigh impossible. André can return in the form of his disinterred corpse; the revolution will keep needing to be fought, in 1812, or in the future: "there is now no enemy to fear, but the one that resides within" (7), a qualification that, given that the conflict of 1776 was itself "internal struggle" (3), affords little reassurance. Rather than the dialectics of historical necessity seemingly brought to visibility by the French Revolution, the American version produces unstable and obscure political theater. "Cooper was evidently searching for an unchanging code of political justice that would correspond to timeless divine laws," writes McWilliams. "Yet his very definition of America was . . . an unformed land of endless change" (26). Between the stasis of ideality and the pure flux of endless change, time can only idle. History becomes notional and dramatic rather than resistless and directive, while politics is so saturated with theater as to vanish into a horizon of meaninglessness.

Notes

1. Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 147.
2. Timothy Dwight, *Travels; New-England and New-York*, Vol. 4 (New Haven, CT: Published by Timothy Dwight, S. Converse, 1822), 442. The literature on André is vast. I have benefitted especially from Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Robert E. Cray, "Major André and the Three Captors: Class Dynamics and Revolutionary Memory Wars, 1780–1831," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 31–39; Robert A. Ferguson, *Reading the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Michael Meranze, "Major André's Exhumation," in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 123–135; and Wayne Franklin, "Introduction," in James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (New York: Penguin, 1997), vii–xxx. Further references to *The Spy* will be to this edition.

3. James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1838 [1828]), 2: 339.
4. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 25.
5. Arendt develops these themes of visibility and the political with great subtlety elsewhere: "Appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses – lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance." See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 50.
6. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 50–59; Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
7. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 104.
8. "Particulars of the Mischianza in America," *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1778, 353–357, quotes from p. 354. The description of the tournament takes up the bulk of André's report.
9. On *Cato* in the colonies, see the recent work of Jason Shaffer, *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), especially chap. 2.
10. Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 336.
11. Daniel O'Quinn, *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770–1790* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 45.
12. Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42.
13. Writing of the Thames regatta, for example, O'Quinn suggests that the direction of the event, and its anchoring public landmarks, enter into its essential meaning: the journey up the Thames "is also a journey from the War Office to the Chelsea Royal Hospital for Invalid Soldiers, which sits immediately adjacent to Ranelagh's famous Rotunda. So the participants in the regatta were involved in a journey not only from the seat of government to the seat of social diversion but also from the place where war is managed to the place where the victims of poor strategy were destined to go . . . . [The regatta] is simultaneously a movement away from

the pressing exigencies of the American situation *and* a movement toward a rumination on the consequences of faulty policy and corrupted character" (97).

14. "Historical accounts also tell the story of Sergeant Major John Champe and Major Henry Lee infiltrating the British camp in the guise of deserters with the hopes of delivering up Arnold to Washington in exchange for André's life" (Tamarkin 141).
15. Joseph Roach's influential work is relevant here. Roach examines the workings of what he calls "surrogation," a complex dance between bearer and function, between the diachrony impressing its irreversibility on the body of the bearer and the synchrony reasserted in the apparent deathlessness of the function; see *Cities of the Dead*.
16. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 35.
17. In the 1831 preface to his novel, Cooper describes a spy whose job it was to "learn in what part of the country the agents of the crown were making their efforts to embody men" (4), and then to let himself be so embodied by enlisting.
18. Many have explored Cooper's debt to Scott. Still important here is George Dekker, *James Fenimore Cooper: the American Scott* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967).
19. H. L. Mencken, "Introduction," in James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat* (Indianapolis, IN: The Liberty Fund, n.d.), xv, ix–x. This is a reissue of the 1931 Mencken edition. *The American Democrat was* originally published in 1838.
20. Charles Hansford Adams, *"The Guardian of the Law": Authority and Identity in James Fenimore Cooper* (University Park: Pennsylvania University State Press, 1990), 30.
21. Joseph J. Letter, "Past Presentisms: Suffering Soldiers, Benjaminian Ruins, and the Discursive Foundations of Early U.S. Historical Novels," *American Literature* 82.1 (March 2010): 29–55, quote from p. 35. This distinction comes from Homi K. Bhabha's essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291–322.
22. Cray, "Major André and the Three Captors," 391.
23. John P. McWilliams, *Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 24.